

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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McGarvey 202/343-5634

FRAMEWORKS FOR WATERFOWL HUNTING REGULATIONS FOR 1977-78 PUBLISHED

Frameworks within which States may select this fall's waterfowl hunting regulations are generally the same as last year, except as noted below, the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said today. The frameworks were published in the September 8 Federal Register.

The exceptions are:

--The frameworks call for a 5-day reduction in season length in the Mississippi Flyway and the eastern part of the Central Flyway. This action is in anticipation of reduced fall flights of ducks and coots through these portions of the country because of drought conditions on the prairies.

--Provision is made for selecting up to 9 days of the regular duck season between October 1 and 15 in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia to allow early harvest opportunity on lightly harvested south-eastern wood duck populations before northern wood ducks arrive.

--Zoning in Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, and Ohio will be allowed to experiment with differing seasons in two zones. This is being tried as a means for improving distribution of hunting opportunity within each State rather than to increase the State's overall harvest. Harvests will be monitored for three years and, if necessary, penalties will be imposed.

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--The Canada goose season in Delaware and portions of Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia is extended to January 31, the season length is expanded from 70 to 90 days, and the daily bag and possession limits are increased from 3 and 6 to 4 and 8 birds, respectively. The regulation is intended to reduce or stabilize the size of the wintering Canada goose population in the area. There is concern about the size of these extremely large goose concentrations because of increasing winter crop depredations, the potential for disease outbreaks, and the impact that may be occurring on food resources utilized by other species of waterfowl.

--The season length for snow geese is increased from 30 to 60 days in the Atlantic Flyway. This snow goose population is considered about as large as can be supported by the available habitat. Crop depredations and salt marsh "eat-outs" are becoming serious problems. Present harvest rates appear to be having no effect on the population, which has been increasing in size annually since about 1971. The population numbered about 155,000 birds in May 1977.

--Louisiana is offered the option of selecting separate goose seasons in the eastern and western zones, as is permitted for duck hunting, to better align duck and goose seasons.

--A revision of the boundaries of the Horicon Zone in Wisconsin and the establishment of a second zone adjacent to Horicon is implemented. In addition, the statewide Canada goose harvest quota is increased from 28,000 to 35,000. These actions are in support of efforts to manage Canada geese that concentrate in excessive numbers on and around Horicon National Wildlife Refuge, and improve goose distribution throughout the Mississippi Flyway. As part of the same program, a similar quota change is made in Illinois.

--Various other changes in Canada goose regulations in the Mississippi Flyway are being implemented. These include daily bag limit changes from 1 to 2 birds in all or parts of Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and Tennessee, establishment of a harvest quota zone in Kentucky (15,000-bird quota), and establishment of a closure zone in Arkansas.

--In South Dakota, a 2-week restriction on the length of the season for hunting Canada and white-fronted geese, imposed in 1976, is removed. South Dakota has adopted regulations pertaining to commercial hunting. The season length is now the same as in 1975.

--Canada goose hunting closures are extended 20 days to November 25 in the San Joaquin Valley area of California to give added protection to the endangered Aleutian Canada goose. Mendocino County, in northwest California, is removed from the tri-county area totally closed to the hunting of Canada geese.

--The biological opinion rendered on August 22, 1977, for the Mexican duck and whooping crane recommended that duck hunting be prohibited this year in all or portions of 12 counties in the Southwestern United States. These closures are aimed at providing additional protection for Mexican ducks and whooping cranes, both of which are classified as endangered species. The closures are based on a biological opinion rendered on August 22, 1977, which resulted from an intensive evaluation of these species by a special team of biologists. The counties of concern include Cochise County in Arizona; Catron, Dona Ana, Hidalgo, and Luna Counties in New Mexico; and Brewster, Culberson, El Paso, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis, Presidio, Reeves, and Pecos Counties in Texas.

--Emergency closures of migratory bird hunting seasons will be considered for protection of Aleutian Canada geese and whooping cranes should circumstances justify.

--Special seasons for hunting migratory game birds by falconry may be selected this year by States already allowing falconry hunting seasons. These States may select seasons not to exceed 107 days for hunting by falconry separate from the regular hunting season for migratory game birds. A daily bag of 2 birds and 4 in possession for ducks, geese, and mergansers, singly or in the aggregate, will apply. For other migratory game birds, a daily bag of 4 birds and 8 in possession for all species combined is allowed. These provisions will allow more opportunity for falconry hunting but result in very little additional harvest of migratory game birds.

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